

JELLY

Clare Rees

CREATIVE WRITING LESSON STARTERS

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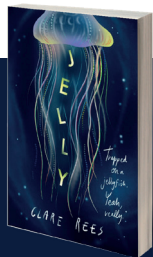
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Jelly was originally written to support a unit aimed at improving students' creative writing.

I wrote alongside the students, but each of the lessons had a key focus. At the start of each lesson students were asked to 'correct' a paragraph of Jelly (AfL). They were then asked to use the issue they had identified as the lesson focus in their own work.

Students were given a free choice of writing topic. On the basis that they were going to be spending at least four weeks writing and developing their composition, it was decided that they should decide on the plot and title. Suggested titles/ inspirational pictures/ sentence starters were given to students as options at the beginning of the unit if they wanted them. Most lessons also had a punctuation, grammar or spelling focus.

The following pages are intended as lesson starters/ideas. They are not designed to be used in any particular order, but rather to respond to student need.



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Do authors really put all those literary devices in on purpose? Do they really intend all those meanings?

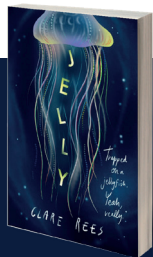
I deliberately used the word, 'tears' as a homograph. I intended to create the impression of both a weeping face (possibly to represent a lost society), but also the idea of destruction.

The row of houses behind stood silently with their decaying exteriors, peeling paint, and dark windows. Although they looked much as I had imagined them, closer up it was hard to avoid the feeling of life, of being watched, and the ghostly remnants of a mysterious society. The windows stared, gaping tears in the face of the grey pebbledash house fronts. The glass was broken in most of them now, jagged splinters slowly eating and shredding the few tattered pieces of curtain which still hung limply from the window frames. There was nothing moving up there, but I didn't like the feeling there could be hidden things behind those walls. Where had those kriks gone?

While describing the houses, I wanted to create tension by hinting at the threat of the kriks. I therefore included a lexical field of destruction.

The question at the end is rhetorical rather than representing just Martha's thoughts, because I wanted the reader to ask themselves the question too. at of the kriks. I therefore included a lexical field of destruction.

It has been worth writing a book It has been worth writing a book just so I can definitively answer this question: yes, authors do deliberately use literary devices to create effects; and yes, they do intend a range of meanings. It takes me around an hour to write 400 words (if I'm lucky!), so I have time to consider every word.



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TASK: in today's lesson, use literary devices in your writing. At the end of the lesson, you should be prepared to underline the examples in your own work, and to explain the reasons for your choices.

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How does the audience shape your writing?

Draft 1

A dark shape with a twisted, bent back paused beneath us. It wore the singed clothes of a man, and had probably been in his 20s when he was infected. It slowly turned its face upwards, so that the white ball of his putrid eye seemed to stare directly at me, its shrinking, shrivelling skin pulled back from the socket, rimming the eyeball with the darkness of nothingness. His leathery lips were drawn away from his teeth in a permanent gruesome smile, making his teeth look larger and more animal than those in an uninfected human face. But his eye paused on me for only a second before roving round, searching for the noise. He couldn't see, I realised; he'd just turned his eyes towards the sound out of a half remembered imitation of humanity.

His distended stomach was pulsating, gleaming every so often with an inner luminescence that cast strange, twisted shadows along the corridor. The bulbous, lumpen mass was protruding unevenly through worn holes in the ragged t-shirt and the exoskeleton was already fibrous and shiny, so that I could see what looked like discoloured veins on the surface, running up the body towards the infected man's neck.

The kriks were originally infected humans with strange, glowing stomachs and claws. So why were they changed?

Draft 5

The krik slowly turned its head upwards, out of its shell slit, so that the white balls of the extended eyes seemed to stare directly at me, thick and meaty, their stalks made from the same material as the eye itself. The shiny, moist skin around them was pulled taut, but there was no iris, just a long, black, pupil – sharp, like a slit of nothingness. The leathery lips were drawn across the shell beneath in a permanent gruesome smile, fixed and too-large, like a grotesque circus clown. The eyes swivelled on, searching for the noise. It couldn't see me, I realised; it'd just turned its eyes towards the sound, but there was no recognition there.....

The shell of the krik was rough and fibrous, glistening from the water. It was patterned, and not just one colour as it had looked from a distance; whorls of interlocking spirals in orange and white ran up the whole of the exoskeleton, decorating it with intricate markings that had a strange beauty. But the shell looped round and around its body, protecting that hidden flesh inside. Every so often there were tiny gaps, mysterious shadows, where the darkness of the body could maybe be seen if you could get close, but from here they just seemed to offer hints of danger: strange, concealed openings.

The legs and pincers moved constantly, independently of each other, searching and scratching at the tarmac, the garden walls, the air. Looking for something to grab. Almost too perfect in their sharp, smooth covering – just hardness and armour – they were ready to spike, maim, rip, hurt.

.....because when my main characters went on to kill them, it was like I was describing the murder of a human. In detail. It was decided that this was not appropriate for the target audience, so the monsters were changed.



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TASK: Write a short description of your audience. It can be just one person if you want. Who are they? What are their interests? Why will what you've written so far appeal to them?

In your lesson today consider audience. At the end of the lesson be prepared to talk about one particular section that will affect them. Explain why.

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Who is telling your story?

The narrator of your story is key to creating the tone, the atmosphere and to manipulating your readers' emotions.

Draft 1

Draft 5

I originally wrote 'Jelly' in the third person.

I initially chose third person because I wanted to tell the story as an outsider observing the action from a physical difference, and a time difference.

They walked on a bit further, but the grass by the river was becoming long and dense. There were low, hidden layers of nettles and brambles which jagged and caught at their arms as they passed, and patches of cow parsley as big as small trees, the heads of the plants splayed out like alien umbrellas swaying above them, shielding them from the sun. The narrow path they were following was now barely even visible, and Martha was trying really hard not to think too much about what had made the trail in the first place. They could still see clearly over the river across to the other side, but the water was muddy and Martha remembered all those creepy stories about tentacles or things reaching out of the water. She didn't want to have the others make fun of her again, but she didn't really feel that safe anymore.

We walked on further, but the grass was becoming long and dense. There were low, hidden layers of nettles and brambles which jagged and caught at our arms as we passed, and patches of cow parsley as big as small trees, the heads of the plants splayed out like alien umbrellas swaying above us, shielding us from the sun. The narrow path we were following was now barely even visible, and I was trying really hard not to think too much about what had made the trail in the first place. We could still see clearly over the river to the other side, but the water was muddy and I remembered all of our discussions about whether kriks needed seawater ... or just any water. I didn't want to have the others make fun of me again, but I didn't really feel safe.

I decided to change the story to make it Martha's (first person) because I thought it might be more interesting if it came entirely from her perspective

The narrator here is omniscient limited. They see everything, but have particular access only to Martha's thoughts. difference, and a time difference.

Occasionally the narrative slipped into using Martha's voice and style of speaking instead of maintaining an omniscient third person distance. This is called free indirect discourse.



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TASK: Who is your narrator? If they're third person consider WHO they are. How do they know the information in your story? Are they a character in their own right? Are there any points where your narrator changes- perhaps by slipping into free indirect discourse?

In today's lesson consider the role of the narrator and be prepared to sum up your decisions.

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What is the importance of sentence structure?

Which of the paragraphs below is better? Why? They are both technically correct.

Paragraph A

The sun was starting to break through, and there were beams of light shining in several spots on the sea; more beams were appearing every few minutes or so, like they were slowing ripping the clouds apart. Most of the sky was dull though: grey, boring, slow-moving. The morning was still bitter, and there were white trails of frost in the shadows of the cliffs.

Paragraph B

The sun was starting to break through. There were beams of light shining in several spots on the sea. More beams were appearing every few minutes or so. It was like they were slowing ripping the clouds apart. Most of the sky was dull though. It was grey, boring and slow-moving. The morning was still bitter. There were white trails of frost in the shadows of the cliffs.

A common problem in creative writing is repetitive sentence structures. You may be using interesting language, using lots of literacy devices and you may know that your plot and characters are fabulous. If it still doesn't sound good, then it's worth checking that you're using a range of sentence structures.

TASK: Sentence Bingo!

Include as many of the following sentence types/ features as you can.

Fronted adverbials

Simple sentences

Declarative sentence

Sentence fragments

Complex sentence

Exclamatory sentence

Semi-colon/ colon

Compound sentence

Interrogatory sentence



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How do you plan a piece of creative writing?

Ask your teacher what their advice is, and why. If your task is linked to an exam question, you should pay particular attention, because you may have key requirements!

In real life (much like in the classroom) authors are divided between those who plan carefully before they start writing, and those who describe themselves as 'pantsers', because they 'fly by the seat of their pants' and never quite know what they're going to write.

I would suggest a compromise. Being a 'pantser' is great if you've got a year and don't mind serious editing, but that can be tricky in a GCSE exam. Equally, ideas do spring into your mind once you've started writing, so planning too carefully might be a waste of time.

Planning point 1

- How long have you got?
- How much do you want to write?

These points should be a key consideration when planning. If you've got a year and 500 pages, then definitely write a complex novel. If you've got 45 minutes and 2 pages of A4, then probably best keep it simple. Don't have too many characters, events or any unnecessary backstory.

Planning point 2

- How is the story going to finish?

If you know how your story is going to end up, it makes it easier to write. What is actually going to happen at the end?

Planning point 3

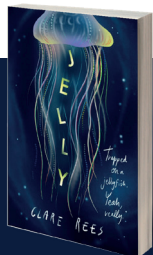
- What is the purpose of the story? What is it about?
- Who is it for? Your real audience may be the exam board- but it's ok to imagine another one when you write.

Your story should be more than just a series of events. It should have a purpose, maybe even a message. Or do your characters change? Are they the same at the beginning and the end?

TASK: 1) What's your timeframe? How does this influence what you will write? Are you writing a novel, short story, or just a description of a single incident? So consider the plot with that in mind. Roughly what's going to happen?

2) Write the final line of your story. Now all you have to do is work out how to get there...

3) What is the purpose of the story? And who is your audience? Is there a message? Or is it an incident which changes your protagonist? Be prepared to explain to the class.



Description (characters and settings)

A good description conveys more than just what something looks like: it conveys a mood- a feeling. It can be a cunning way of manipulating your readers' emotions or giving them additional information.

Most people don't know what long-dead bodies look like. The fact that Martha does, and that she says it in such an unemotional way indicates that she's seen a few.

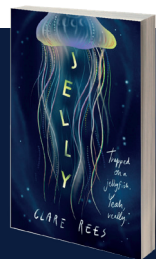
Next to us, on the mesoglea, there was that pile of five bodies. They looked even worse now, dripping and wrinkled with saturated water on their lower halves, where they'd been floating. Their top halves were still dry, wizened and leathery. You could see where the crispy flaps of dried flesh were starting to peel away from the bone in that way that they do, particularly on the scalp.

The knowledge that we were now sharing our living space with them was not a pleasant thought.

Beyond them, there were the rest of The Jellyfish People. Right at that moment, looking at them over the top of the body pile, it was hard not to notice that the corpses were better dressed, and had much nicer hair. The Jellyfish People looked dirty, cold, ragged, sore and..... just, hopeless.

Shows that the mysterious ecological disaster happened long enough ago for the bodies to have almost mummified.

The fact that the jellyfish people are compared, negatively, to dead bodies perhaps hints at their own death, or reminds us how perilous their situation is.



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TASK: in today's lesson have a look back through your descriptions. What information are they giving us? What will your reader learn from them? If you're stuck, try swapping with a neighbour for feedback. Write at least one description of either a character or a setting which also conveys a mood. Be prepared to share your work and explain your choices.

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